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A Study of Seventeen School Districts on Probationary Status After a Remediation Process

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Bettye Pulliam Holcombe
Houston Separate School District
Houston, Mississippi

Aubrey W. Shelton
Professor
Curriculum and Instruction
Mississippi State University

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AUTHOR Holcombe, Bettye Pulliam; Shelton, Aubrey W.
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ABSTRACT

As a result of the Educational Reform Act in 1982, the Mississippi State Board of Education adopted accreditation levels from 1 to 5, with 1 being the lowest level. In 1988, 17 school districts were assigned to the Level 1 status by the Commission on School Accreditation, based on results of the following performance standards: Basic Skills Assessment Program (BSAP), Stanford Achievement Test (SAT) in grades 4 and 6, and Functional Literacy Examination (FLE) in grade 11. As mandated, all Level 1 school districts must write and implement a district remediation plan. The MSDE employed 57 consultants to work with the 17 Level 1 school districts for 1 year. Each district's remediation plan was developed using the consultants' findings, the test data of the district, and other information about the areas of deficiency. This study assessed whether or not there were any differences in achievement between the 17 Level 1 school districts and the bottom 18 Level 2 school districts before and after a remediation process by the Mississippi State Department of Education (MSDE). The results in reading, math, and written communication on the BSAP in grades 3, 5, and 8; and on the FLE in grade 11 are reported. The SAT results in grades 4 and 6 in reading, math, and language are reported. Data for the 1987 and 1988 test administrations were obtained from the MSDE. The data were analyzed using an independent "t" test. The results show a significant difference in the 1987 testing of the Level 1 and Level 2 school districts. Before the remediation process, there was a significant difference in 6 of the 18 performance standards. These differences were found on the SAT for grades 4 and 6 in reading, math, and language. After the remediation process, only one difference was found in the 18 performance standards; this difference was on the SAT for grade 6 in language. Two data tables are included. (RLC)

Statement of the Problem

The problem in this study was to determine if there are differences in achievement between the 17 Level-I school districts and the bottom 18 Level II school districts before and after a remediation process by the State Department of Education.

Rationale

During the past fifty years the educational system in the United States has been challenged by the public to provide a better education for students. Many controversies and criticisms of the public schools have been issued to educators by parents, citizens, school boards, legislators, governors, and Presidents. The decline in education has had the nation's attention for the past several years. The 1976 Gallup Poll by a 2-1 majority believed that the decline in national scores meant the quality of education was declining. On the 1977 Gallup Poll, 83 percent of the population polled favored the back-to-basics movement. The 1980 Gallup reported that parents of children in school believed not enough attention was given by the local public schools to reading, writing, and arithmetic.

In addition to books and articles, many reports and studies awakened the publics' interest in and concern about education. In 1983 "A Nation at Risk" called for a reform movement in education in order for America to retain its small lead in the world markets. The report also called for schools to "adopt more rigorous and measurable standards and higher expectations for student academic performance."(A Nation At Risk, p. 19) States strongly examined their current educational systems and sought ways to improve them. By 1984 nearly three hundred task forces in the fifty states had been appointed to search for excellence.(Cross, 1984) In most states, the current early 1980's movement was, among other mandates, to "assure that students reach a minimum level to competency in the basic skills at certain grade levels and prior to being awarded a high school diploma." (Neill, 1978, p.8)

In response to the public's demand for better schools, the Mississippi Legislature passed the Educational Reform Act in 1982. It mandated an accreditation system for schools that was related to instructional effectiveness to measure and rate schools, to monitor continued performance, and required a state response on inadequate performance. The State Board of Education was given the responsibility of developing and implementing an effective state system of educational accountability. School districts would be accredited based on student achievement of specific outcome measures. Accreditation levels from 1 to 5 were adopted with 1 being the lowest level.(Mississippi State Department of Education, 1989)

In 1988, seventeen school districts were assigned to the Level 1 status by the Commission on School Accreditation. These assignments were based on the Basic Skills Assessment Program (BSAP) in grades 3, 5, and 8; the Stanford Achievement Test in grades 4 and 6; and the Functional Literacy Examination (FLE) in grade 11.(Mississippi State Department of Education, 1989)

All Level 1 school districts are required by the Commission to write a district remediation plan. "The remediation plan will: 1) be based upon the results of analysis of the district program and test data, 2) be approved by the school board as documented in school board minutes, and 3) be filed with the Commission within 60 days of the official notification of status."(Mississippi State Department of Education, 1989) A review process was approved by the Commission and directed by personnel from the State Department of Education. All the seventeen Level 1 district superintendents and/or school boards chose for the state to conduct the review which included finance; curriculum/instruction; basic skills, academic reward, college core, and at-risk students; evaluation of staff, and community involvement.(Mississippi State Department of Education, 1989)

Educators from forty-four school districts and three universities, for a total of fifty-seven consultants, began to work with the seventeen Level 1 school districts. Five educators composed each district team which consisted of the following: a finance consultant, a curriculum/instruction consultant; a basic skills, academic

reward, college core, and at-risk student consultant; an instructional and administrative staff evaluation consultant; and a community consultant.

The districts were given the publication A Plan for Technical Assistance which was developed by the Bureau of School Improvement to follow in the remediation process. The consultants were given the publication School District/School Staff, and Program Review at a training meeting to help structure their reports about the districts.

A remediation plan for the district was developed using the consultant's findings, the test data of the district, and other information about the areas of deficiency. A one-year time line addressed the following strategies: action plan target area(s), strategies/procedures, implementation dates, list of resources, cost estimates, and the position of the person(s) responsible. District personnel, school board members, principals, and teachers were involved with the plan. After the plan was approved by the local school board, a required one-page summary was presented personally by the superintendent to the Mississippi Commission on School Accreditation for their approval.

The assignment of accreditation levels identified problems with student achievement in school districts, but it provided no way of remediating those problems. In its 1988 session the Mississippi Legislature appropriated $150,000 for use in remediating the difficulties in the seventeen school districts. Additional assistance, ranging from $1000 to $1500 per school district were provided by the state for small grants which were used for any activity to implement the district's remediation plan. State grants for special staff development, of $2500 per district, were used to pay teachers to work outside the contract time on revising or developing a local instructional management. The State Department of Education received a grant from The Phil Hardin Foundation for $100,000 with the stipulation that the money be used for district remediation strategies and that every two dollars of grant money be matched with one dollar of local money. Agencies within the State Department of Education worked with Level 1 districts. Other agencies within the state also provided assistance.

Procedure

The Mississippi State Department of Education employed fifty-seven consultants to work with the seventeen Level 1 school districts for a year. The consultants spent from three to thirteen days at the district examining records, interviewing and observing staff, analyzing the instructional program, and writing a report. This report was given to the district and a copy was sent to the Bureau of School Improvement. A district's remediation plan was developed using the consultant's findings, the test data of the district, and other information about the areas of deficiency.

The instruments, the Basic Skills Assessment Program, the Functional Literacy Examination, and the Stanford Achievement Test are administered in all Mississippi public school districts annually each spring. The results are reported in reading, math, and written communication on the Basic Skills Assessment Program in grades three, five, and eight and on the Functional Literacy Examination in grade eleven. The Stanford Achievement Test results are reported in grades four and six in reading, math, and language. The data for the 1987 testing and the 1988 testing were obtained from the State Department of Education.

Definitions

1. Level 1 - school districts that have failed to comply with at least 70% of the established performance standards.(Mississippi State Department of Education, 1988)
2. Level 2 - school districts that have met between 70 and 99% of the established performance standards.(Mississippi State Department of Education, 1988)
3. Performance standards - standards which establish outcomes which are multiple measures [minimum scale score values established for reading, mathematics, and writing subtests in the third, fifth, and eighth grade Basic Skills Assessment Program (BSAP) and the Functional Literacy Examination (FLE) and minimum normal curve equivalent values (NCE) established for the reading, language, and

mathematics subtests on the Stanford Achievement Test (SAT) in grades four and six that represent desired attainment of Mississippi school districts.(Mississippi State Department of Education, 1988)

Findings

The date were analyzed using an independent t test. The analysis showed a significant difference in the 1987 testing of the Level I and the Level II school districts. Before the remediation process there was a significant difference in six of the eighteen performance standards. These differences were on the Stanford Achievement Test in fourth grade and in sixth grade in reading, math, and language. After the remediation process, only one difference was found in the eighteen performance standards. This was on the Stanford Achievement Test sixth grade language.

Table 1

A Comparison of Level I and Level II Students on Achievement Tests (1987)

Test	Grade	Subject	Level I			Level II			t
			n	Mean	SD	n	Mean	SD	
BSAP	3	Reading	17	32.76	12.35	18	37.86	.63	1.75
BSAP	3	Math	17	32.61	12.29	18	37.60	.63	1.72
BSAP	3	Written Communication	17	33.04	12.45	18	38.05	.57	1.71
BSAP	5	Reading	17	49.41	18.60	18	56.57	.39	1.63
BSAP	5	Math	17	49.94	18.80	18	57.01	.60	1.60
BSAP	5	Written Communication	17	49.36	18.58	18	56.58	.55	1.65
BSAP	8	Reading	17	75.42	28.39	18	86.02	.70	1.59
BSAP	8	Math	17	75.65	28.48	18	86.37	.74	1.60
BSAP	8	Written Communication	17	76.50	28.80	18	87.24	.46	1.58
FLE	11	Reading	17	24.65	6.40	18	26.43	.75	1.18
FLE	11	Math	17	25.29	6.63	18	26.79	.96	.93
FLE	11	Written Communication	17	24.55	6.36	18	26.29	.83	1.15
SAT	4	Reading	17	3.40	1.37	18	4.09	.33	2.07*
SAT	4	Math	17	3.60	1.46	18	4.48	.36	2.47*
SAT	4	Language	17	3.69	1.45	18	4.60	.28	2.60*
SAT	6	Reading	17	3.16	1.22	18	4.03	.47	2.79*
SAT	6	Math	17	3.64	1.40	18	4.67	.40	3.01*
SAT	6	Language	17	3.66	1.40	18	4.63	.41	2.81*

*$t \geq 2.04$ significant at .05 level

Table 2

A Comparison of Level I and Level II Students on Achievement Tests (1988)

Test	Grade	Subject	Level I			Level II			t
			n	Mean	SD	n	Mean	SD	
BSAP	3	Reading	17	33.34	12.57	18	38.11	.54	1.61
BSAP	3	Math	17	33.28	12.54	18	37.98	.71	1.59
BSAP	3	Written Communication	17	33.72	12.71	18	38.28	.59	1.52
BSAP	5	Reading	17	50.01	18.83	18	56.82	.47	1.54
BSAP	5	Math	17	50.64	19.07	18	57.50	.68	1.53
BSAP	5	Written Communication	17	49.97	18.82	18	56.83	.48	1.55
BSAP	8	Reading	17	75.94	28.58	18	86.33	.59	1.54
BSAP	8	Math	17	76.50	28.80	18	86.57	.76	1.48
BSAP	8	Written Communication	17	76.85	28.93	18	87.22	.44	1.52
FLE	11	Reading	17	25.12	6.52	18	26.41	.63	.83
FLE	11	Math	17	25.21	6.56	18	26.97	.96	1.01
FLE	11	Written Communication	17	24.85	6.43	18	26.35	.71	.99
SAT	4	Reading	17	3.94	1.69	18	4.16	.73	.51
SAT	4	Math	17	4.06	1.64	18	4.41	.78	.80
SAT	4	Language	17	3.96	1.57	18	4.52	.51	1.44
SAT	6	Reading	17	3.65	1.58	18	3.96	.56	.78
SAT	6	Math	17	3.97	1.60	18	4.63	.66	1.61
SAT	6	Language	17	3.83	1.50	18	4.61	.55	2.07*

*$t \geq 2.04$ significant at .05 level

Summary

The purpose of this study was to determine if there were differences in achievement between the 17 Level I school districts after a remediation process and the bottom 18 Level II school districts.

Eighteen performance standards were studied. They were: the Basic Skills Assessment Program in grades three, five, eight in the areas of reading, math, and written communication; the Functional Literacy Examination in grade eleven in reading, math, and written communication; and the Stanford Achievement Test in grades four and six in reading, math, and language.

The data were analyzed using an independent t test. In the 1987 testing of the school districts, there was a significant difference at the .05 level in the Stanford Achievement Test in grades four and six in reading, math, and language. The Level II school districts were higher than the Level I school districts. In the 1988 testing of the school districts, there was only one significant difference at the .05 level on the Stanford Achievement Test in sixth grade language.

The study found that the remediation process used by the State Department of Education did make a significant difference in the Level I school districts on the eighteen performance standards.

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